3:Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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VI

From Cradle to Grave

THE Comanche infant was born into a world of adults who welcomed and cherished it. It was not looked upon as a nuisance or handicap, but rather as a valuable addition to the tribe. Girls were accepted, but boys were preferred. Some families made a practice of painting a black spot on the door of the tipi if a newborn child was a boy, as a means of informing the people that the tribe had been strengthened by the addition of another "brave." Although the motherly affection that was the child's due was bestowed upon both male and female, boys received greater care than girls from their mothers and more indulgence from both parents all along the line.

There is conflicting opinion about twins. The woman who bore twin boys might be honored; other parents might regard twins as unnatural. Sometimes the parents attempted to destroy one or both of them, particularly if one or both were girls, but the more common practice was to give one away if foster parents could be found. For fear her husband might destroy both, the mother would sometimes dispose of one and not inform her husband that she had given birth to twins. In the eighteen eighties Dr. George Holley discovered and saved an infant, which was one of twins, buried in sand by its mother. There is at least one other recorded instance of such a rescue.[1]

Infanticide also seems to have been practiced in case the infant was born deformed, diseased, or a weakling. The attending women

[1] Annie M. Barnes, *Matouchon: A Story of Indian Child Life*, 11.

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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595 on the march, unless menstruating, when he carried it himself. In fact, however, plural wives tended to reduce the domestic drudgery of all through a sharing of labor.

A man with only two or three wives and not too many children kept them all in one tipi. An important man's wives ordinarily lived apart, however, each woman having her own tent for herself and her children. Among the poorer families when wives were sisters, they sometimes used only the one tipi and possibly one bed for a time, but they always constructed separate tipis as soon as possible.[20] The opening of these tents was on the main tipi which was occupied by the husband. Long buckskin strings, attached to the buffalo mattress of each woman, were laid under the fold of the tent into the tipi of the husband so that he could instantly summon any one of his wives.

163 Comanche women were not very prolific, and death of the mother
842 at childbirth was not uncommon.[21] The average birth rate seems
847 scarcely to have exceeded two children to each woman, and it was a rare case when there were more than three or four born to one woman. Births were far apart, and the newborn were usually small. Many women were barren. Contraceptives were unknown to the Comanches, but abortions were practiced by beating the belly with stones. Hard physical work and constant horseback riding also apparently induced abortions so early in pregnancy that they went unnoticed.

844 Giving birth to a child was ordinarily a simple affair. Cases have been reported of women on the trail dropping behind the group, giving birth to their children, and then after a few hours rejoining the group on the march.[22] Under normal conditions, however, natal preparations were made. If a woman had her own tipi, she might use it; but if it was used by other members of the family, a separate lodge was constructed. In the summer it would be of brush about eight feet in diameter and six or seven feet high. Inside the lodge the earth

[20] Informant: See How Deep the Water Is.

[21] R. N. Richardson, "The Culture of the Comanche Indians," Texas Archeological and Paleontological Society *Bulletin*, 1 (1929), 63.

[22] Burnet, "The Comanches and Other Tribes of Texas and the Policy to Be Pursued Respecting Them," *loc. cit.*, 234; Humfreville, *Twenty Years among Our Hostile Indians*, 182.

7: Richardson D-4 (no date) 1929
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each side. To the center was attached his buffalo hair plait, 291
studded, at intervals of an inch or two, with enormous silver 177
medallions, of an oval shape, and at least four inches in largest diameter. This plait swept the ground, and he seemed to set great store by it, as nothing would induce him to part with one of the ornaments. A rifle and bow, quiver and arrows, completed his costume and equipments; but being slender in figure and short in stature, his appearance was not at all imposing.

In contrast to Naroni other Indians are described: 291
"Straightfellow was very miserably clad, dirty and ragged, with a very forbidding countenance, indicative of cunning and cruelty." While the women impressed the writer as being "Ugly, crooked-legged, stoop-shouldered, squalid and dirty, with haggard and prematurely old countenances, their hair cropped close to their heads, and with scarce a rag to cover their nakedness.[11]

The wonderful physical stamina of the American Indian has often 147
been commented upon by enthusiastic writers who have been wont to contrast their rugged physiques and powers of endurance with corresponding qualities in the softer and more effete civilized people. Doubtless nature, manifesting herself in the harsh environment of the plains country, mercilessly worked towards the elimination of weaker individuals so that those who survived to the age of maturity were generally sound. However that may be, it is certain that the Comanches had lost this physical superiority (if, indeed, they ever had it) by the time they had completed their southward migration. The fecundity of the women was low for a savage [842] ●
people, death of the mother at child-birth was not uncommon, and 164
rheumatism caused much suffering. Diseases brought by white intruders, such as Cholera, Smallpox and syphilis swept away many of the savages.[12] For smallpox they had no remedy other than [757]
the sweat bath followed by the cold plunge.

11. W. B. Parker, **Notes Taken during the Expedition Commanded by Captain R. B. Marcy, U. S. A., through Unexplored Texas, in the summer and Fall of 1854** (Philadelphia, 1856), 194.

12. The archives of the Indian office of the Republic of Texas, at Austin and of the United States Indian Office at Washington contain references to these diseases too numerous to cite. Also, the Bexar Archives and the Archivo General, at the University of Texas and Mexico City respectively, indicate that during the Spanish period smallpox frequently ravaged the Comanche bands. For more general statements see, The Report of Alex B. Hasson, as cited and James Mooney, **Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians, Seventeenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology**, I, 173, 289, 168, 172, 176, 274, 511, 177.

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
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to the Comanches. The girl told young Parker that if it was his intention to live around Cache, become another Carlisle loafer, and bask in the reflection of his father's glory, she wasn't interested. But if he was willing to go away and live where people had never heard of the Comanches or of Quanah Parker, she would marry him.

Quanah's son agreed to leave Oklahoma, and they married and moved to Florida. The one thing young Parker could think of that he would have the nerve to try was driving a baggage wagon. So they bought a team and a light dray, and he began hauling baggage and making light deliveries. He made a living from the start, and in time built a first-class transfer business.

But Charley Ross and Quanah Parker's son were exceptions. As a lawyer in Oklahoma City I saw a number of pitiable incidents in the courts, in which Indians who couldn't catch hold of the new life were testifying through an interpreter. I know they had been sent to government schools, but they preferred to pretend they didn't know English, rather than to accept the responsibilities of their training. They wished to be thought of as belonging to an older generation that had been denied advantages.

The educated young women, too, fell into the dull, dawdling existence led by their men, although I did know two girls, just out of school, who married industrious white men and became hard-working wives, and whose unions prospered financially. (Comanche wives, by the way, seldom bore more than two children, and often only one. But mixed marriages, particularly those of a white man and a Comanche woman, produced fruitfully.)

One episode illustrates the attitude of most of the educated women. We had been operating the store several months, and I was proud of my good trade vocabulary. I knew the Comanche name for almost everything in the store that might interest the Indians, and I know their names and designations of money. One day, however, I was neither making myself understood by a very old squaw nor understanding what she was trying to tell me.

The ancient one's patience wore thin, and I am sure the line of chatter flowing from her withered lips in a stream was not complimentary to either my intelligence or my ancestry. Then I was suddenly rescued by a pleasant-faced, nice-mannered young Comanche woman on whom I had waited many times. "She wants coffee," she told me in perfect English.

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
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the stampeding buffalo without stepping into a grass-covered badger or prairie-dog hole.

It was his medicine that enabled him to crawl into a cavalry bivouac and sever the eight-foot rope that each soldier had tied to his wrist, so his horse might graze safely during the night, and without waking the sleeper or his comrades lead the horse away.

It was his medicine that caused his wives to be friendly and congenial, one with the other. It resulted in the wives' caring for his camp, looking after his surplus horses, and bearing mostly boy babies. For none of these things did he take credit personally. But he was justly proud of his medicine that had brought all these things about, and he guarded it like a jealous lover.

To sum up the attributes of a name-giver: he needed a keen ear and an extensive knowledge of the vocabulary—perhaps a sense of humor helped—and he must have a successful reputation as a warrior-hunter and a willingness to share his medicine. Custom required him to give each individual named a supply of his medicine. Warriors often refused to give a name because it meant parting with a portion of their medicine. They feared the remainder might prove inadequate. Apparently the true name-giver's supply had a similarity to the oil in the cruse and the meal in the barrel of the widow at Zarepath, while she fed the fugitive Elijah. It was replenished as used.

My reading indicates that the Comanche placed more emphasis or dependence on the name than did any of the other Plains tribes. A warrior might carry a number of names, should he live a long and successful life. In the event a boy developed into a sickly youngster, or was accident-prone, his parents were apt to seek out one reputed to have even stronger medicine than the one who gave him the first name and ask for another name. Directly after puberty when a youth went alone to fast and pray for a vision, should his vision have particular significance, he would be given a name in keeping with the vision. But no Comanche dared name himself.

After his acceptance as a warrior, should he develop outstanding characteristics in methods, strategy, or bravery, he might be given yet another name, descriptive of his accomplishments. For example, there was the Mexican captive Mo-cho-rook, about whom I tell in another chapter. Raised and trained as a Comanche warrior, he was given this name because "he so cruel, he makes Comanche blood run cold." He became a legend while yet he lived.